

# Improving Safe Blood Donation in Nigeria: The Roles of the Mass Media

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## Abstract

The study discusses improving safe blood donation in Nigeria and the roles of the mass media in achieving same in Nigerian hospitals. In this regard, it answers the questions: What is blood? What is blood donation? And is safe blood donation adequate in Nigeria? Beyond the relevant answers given on the above questions, it also explains the roles of mass media in improving safe blood donations among Nigerians. Besides this, it recommends among others that the federal government, state government, private hospitals and concerned Nigerians should encourage mass media campaigns continuously on the need for safe blood donations to save lives. It also upholds that the federal and state governments should establish more blood banks in their health facilities, in order to spur the people, who would become aware through the mass media, to access same for safe blood donations.

**Keywords:** Improvement, Safe Blood, Donation, Roles, the Mass Media

## 1. Introduction

Every human being requires blood; hence it is essential to all human life, the world over. This seems obvious because blood constitutes approximately 8 percent of body weight; and the volume of it in the average male is between 5 -6 litres and in the average female is between 4-5 litres (Geddes and Grosset, 2000). In this circumstance therefore, if one lacks blood either because one did not eat nutritious food adequately or because one is sick, he or she will depend on blood donated by others to survive in the hospital.

Again, in any country where people appear to be seemingly irresponsible to safe blood donation to save lives, the resultant effect is often high mortality rate among them. This appears to be the situation in Nigeria; since there is insufficient safe blood bank due to lack luster attitude of people to voluntarily donate blood in health facilities. It is this undermining circumstance that spurred the study on *improving safe blood donation in Nigeria: the roles of the mass media*. In achieving this, the study adumbrates what blood is, what blood donation is, if safe blood donation is adequate in Nigeria, why safe blood donation is at low-rise in Nigeria, and the roles of the mass media in improving safe blood donation among Nigerians. Based on the foregoing, conclusion would be drawn and recommendations made for the study.

## 2. What is Blood?

The Bantam Medical Dictionary (1996) sees blood as fluid tissue that circulates throughout the body, via the arteries and veins, providing a vehicle by which an immense variety of different substances are transported between the various organs and tissues. More precisely, it is a specialized bodily fluid that supplies essential substances and nutrients, such as sugar, oxygen, and hormones to our cells, and carries waste away from those cells, for which this waste is eventually flushed out of the body in urine, faeces, sweat, and through the lungs (Nordqvist, 2010).

Furthermore, blood is made of four components:

*Plasma: a mixture of water, sugar, fat, protein, and potassium and calcium salt. It also contains many chemicals that help form blood clots necessary to stop bleeding. More than 92% of plasma is water. Red blood cells (erythrocytes): they contain a special protein called haemoglobin, which carries the oxygen we inhale with our lungs to all of the parts of our bodies. It then returns carbondioxide from our bodies to our lungs so we can exhale it. Haemoglobin is also responsible for making red blood cells red.*

*White blood cells (leukocytes): they are clear round cells that are bigger than red blood cells. They produce proteins called antibodies that help our bodies fight infections caused by bacteria, viruses, and foreign proteins. Platelets (thrombocytes): they are not really cells at all; they are just fragments of cells. When we are injured, platelets gather at the site of the injury and stick to the edges of the wound. They release chemicals that help start the process of blood clotting so that bleeding will stop (Nordqvist, 2010).*

Besides the components of blood, it is a fluid of life that should be donated voluntarily to blood banks, used for transfusions or made into medications by a process called fractionation, in so much so that same will save the lives of the ill or dying patients in hospitals.

### **What then is Blood Donation?**

This is a medical process, in which a healthy person gives blood to a patient or blood bank either voluntarily without remuneration or with remuneration. Wikipedia (2013) sees blood donation as when a person voluntarily has blood drawn and used for transfusions. In the event of this, blood is donated, after screening for diseases that can be transmitted by a blood transfusion, such as HIV and viral hepatitis must have been achieved by health professionals in health facilities. Alongside also, the donor must answer questions about medical history and take a short physical examination to make sure the donation is not hazardous to him or her health (Wikipedia, 2013). Wikipedia (2013) further explains that blood donation is divided into three types, namely whole blood donation, plasma donation and platelet donation.

### **3. Is Safe Blood Donation Adequate in Nigeria?**

The answer to this question is an obvious “No”; hence patients die in hospitals due to inadequate safe blood at blood banks in Nigeria. This is so because a recent interview with Business Day, Folake Ademola-Majekodunmi, Director of Special Services, Federal Ministry of Health, revealed that while the need for blood is universal, there is a major imbalance in developing and developed countries in the level of access to safe blood (Chiejina, 2012). Ademola-Majekodunmi stated that the average donation rate in developed countries is 38.1 donations/1000 populations, 7.5 in transitional countries, and 2.3 donations per 1000 population in developing countries, including Nigeria (Chiejina, 2012). Based on the above statistics, it appears that safe blood in Nigeria is at low-rise; and this posits a major challenge to the health of Nigerians.

### **Why is Safe Blood Donation at Low-rise in Nigeria?**

The low-rise of blood donation in Nigeria is associated with the way people perceive same, based on their religious beliefs. For instance, the Jehovah’s Witnesses see blood donation and transfusion as against the will of God; since the Creator declared in Genesis 9: 4-6:

*“Everything that lives and moves will be food for you.... But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it.” He added: “For your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting” and then He condemned murder (Coogan, Brettler, Newsom and Perkins, 2001; Awake 1990).*

Beyond the Jehovah’s Witnesses beliefs in resisting blood donation and transfusion, certain factors seem to be responsible for low-rise in blood donation in Nigeria, which include:

1. Inadequate information about safe blood donation through electronic and print media;
2. People’s phobia of being detected as HIV positive persons;
3. People’s phobia of possible contraction of HIV in the hospitals through blood donation;
4. Federal and state governments’ non-commitment and support for effective national, state and local safe blood programmes;
5. Inadequate blood banks and equipment in hospitals and other health facilities;
6. Inadequate trained professional staff to manage blood banks professionally;
7. Inadequate funds to establish more blood banks, as well as manage the existing ones;
8. Lack of public trust in the blood transfusion service, and so on.

### **4. The Roles of the Mass Media in Improving Safe Blood Donations among Nigerians**

Mass media campaigns are used to inform the people about certain messages through the routine use of the electronic media and newspapers; in order to expose wrong doings as well as encourage positive behaviours in any society. Furthermore, the great promise of mass media campaigns lies in their ability to disseminate well defined behaviourally focused messages to large audiences repeatedly, over time, in an incidental manner, and at a low cost per head (Wakefield, Loken and Hornik, 2010). Panoramically, Wakefield, Loken and Hornik (2010) also explains that,

*Mass media may stand alone or be linked to other organized programme components, such as chemical or institutional outreach for easy access to newly available or existing products or services, or may complement policy change.*

In tandem with the wide roles of mass media, their multiple methods of dissemination might be used if health campaigns are part of broader social marketing programmes (Kotler and Lee, 2008); especially too, if the information about specific health need, such as blood donation and transfusion are encouraged through the mass

media. But where this is not the case, and there is no effort to disseminate health information about the need for blood donation, the people will suffer for same, especially if their wives, children and friends are hospitalized, and they need safe blood to save their lives.

This seems the case in Nigeria, where blood donation programmes appear low, and people seemingly do not donate blood frequently due to inadequate information through the mass media. In this regard, what are the roles of mass media in improving the zeal for safe blood donations among Nigerians? *Ipsa facto*, these roles include:

1. To inform Nigerians about the need for improved safe blood donations to save lives, and how same will further reduce maternal and child morbidity rates as well as their mortality rates.
2. To inform Nigerians about the danger of increasing blood in their bodies above what is required by them.
3. To inform Nigerians that safe blood donation will help them know their health status. Hence, in the circumstances of diseases found in screening their blood, they will be advised by hospital personnel to go treat same or commence treatment immediately.
4. To inform Nigerians about the relevance of blood banks, and why the donation of safe blood in same gives the doctors, and other health professionals confidence in treating patients, especially during medical operations as well as child birth in hospitals.
5. To inform Nigerians that safe blood donation has nothing to do with cultural myths and religious fate; rather it is used to save lives in hospitals and other health facilities in Nigeria.

## 5. Conclusion

It is absolutely true that improving safe blood donations among Nigerians will save the lives of patients who need blood in Nigeria. With the roles of the mass media well played, safe blood donations will also be improved in blood banks, in that people will no more find it difficult to buy safe blood or donate same when their brothers, relatives and friends are sick in emergency situations and/or undergoing medical operations in Nigerian hospitals. In order to improve the health of Nigerians as well as spur them on the need for blood donation and transfusion in Nigeria, the study encourages other areas of research on the relationship between inadequate blood banks and availability of safe blood in Nigerian hospital; and the relationship between the level of power supply to blood banks and decline in protected safe blood for transfusion in Nigerian hospitals.

## Recommendations

The study recommends that the federal government, state government, private hospitals and concerned Nigerians should encourage mass media campaigns continuously on the need for safe blood donations to save lives. It also recommends that federal and state governments should establish more blood banks in their health facilities, in order to spur the people, who would become aware through the mass media, to access same for safe blood donations. Again, it recommends that federal and state governments should provide funds adequately, as well as employ qualified health personnel to manage the existing blood banks in Nigerian health facilities. Finally, it further recommends that cultural and religious myths in blood donations should be discarded for today's scientific ways of improving and saving lives through safe blood donations and transfusions in Nigeria.

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